DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 273 614 SP 027 995

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TITLE Teachers Education Development in the Arab Gulf States.
PUB DATE Jul 86
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the World Assembly of the International Council on Education for Teaching (33rd, Kingston, Jamaica, July 20-24, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Arabs; Developing Nations; Educational Resources; Foreign Countries; *Non Western Civilization; *Preservice Teacher Education; Socioeconomic Status; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Shortage; *Teacher Supply and Demand
IDENTIFIERS Arab Gulf States

ABSTRACT

In the first section of this paper, an overview of the teaching profession in the Arab Gulf States is presented. One of the most troubling problems in this area is that education has expanded rapidly, widely, and in an unprecedented manner. This phenomena is coupled with a great shortage of teachers for all subjects and specializations. This teacher supply and demand imbalance is exacerbated by the availability of better career opportunities in other fields. Descriptions are given in section two of the various types of institutions providing teacher preparation. Three kinds of institutes for teacher education currently coexist: teacher institutes (equivalent to secondary education); junior colleges and centers for qualifying teachers; and university colleges of education. In the final section of the paper, some of the suggested developments regarding teacher education and the teaching profession are discussed. The recommendation has been made that teacher education be unified by making preparation only within the university framework. There is also a call for colleges of education to focus more strongly on research and innovation. Dissenting viewpoints on these two suggestions are briefly considered. There appears to be agreement on the desirability of improving the social and economic status of teachers. (JD)

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Teachers Education Development in the Arab Gulf States*

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SP 027 995

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* A paper presented at the Thirty-Third ICET World Assembly held in Kingston, Jamaica, July 20-24 1986

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Teachers Education Development in the Arab Gulf States

I. Introduction

Education is now-a-days a major and central preoccupation of every nation in the world. This is true of all nations regardless of the nation's present level or degree of development. In all nations, developed and developing alike, there is indeed a conspicious dissatisfaction regarding both the performance and outputs of the educational systems.

This dissatisfaction was conceived, almost twenty years ago, as a world educational crisis(1)*. At that time, two major forms of such a crisis were identified. The first was seen as a world wide one. It has been depicted as the disparity between the hopes of individuals and needs of society, on the one hand, and the capabilities of the educational systems on the other hand. The second form taken by the world educational crisis was perceived as the greater disparity between the developing countires, faced with the many and crucial restraints of grossly inadequate educational resources, and the developed countries, which are increasingly preoccupied with their own internal needs(2).

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* References cited are to be found at the end of this paper.

I believe that the crisis which has been seen in education on 1967 is still with us, and has been more acute. One of the most effective ways of bridging the educational gap between developed and developing countries is to organize occasions and channels through which education from developed and developing countries can exchange ideas and insights regarding educational problems.

The thirty-third ICET assembly and the like conferences may be fruitful vehicles for mutual understanding of the world educational crisis which plague all nations in one form or another. This is the motive which drives me to present to you this paper on "Teachers Education Development in the Arab Gulf States." The fundamental aim of this paper is to provide you with a description of the states-of-affairs of teachers education in one of the important regions in the world. The paper will be presented in three sections. In the first section an overview of teaching profession will be given. The second section will be devoted to teachers' preparation institutes. The paper will end with some suggested improvements to be made in the realm of teachers education, together with some comments on each suggestion.

II An Overview of Teaching Profession

The Arab Gulf States of which this paper speaks are the following states: Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Sultanate of Omman and the United Arab Emirates. These seven nations constitute the membership of the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS), a semi-regional organization in charge of coordination and development of educational, scientific and cultural affairs in the above-mentioned countries. I have been honoured by being its Director General since 1979 till now.

Let me start this overview on teaching profession in our region with stating that there is a firm belief, on the part of Statesmen and educators, that teachers, next to students, are the largest and most crucial inputs of the educational systems. However, teaching profession is beset in the Arab Gulf States with numerous problems and difficulties. One of the blistering rubs in all Arab Gulf States is teachers, supply - demand imbalance. One of the most obvious phenomena in all Arab Gulf States is that education has expanded, too much, and too fast in an unprecedented manner. This is true of all the stages and kinds of education. This phenomenon is coupled with a great shortage of teachers of all subject matters and specializations. Needless to say; that teachers, supply-demand imbalance is a part of the over-all manpower shortages in

the Arab Gulf States. It was imperative, in all the Arab Gulf States, to overcome this difficulty through recruitment of many expatriate teachers from other Arab and non-Arab countries. The expatriate teachers are paid salaries, fringe benefits and external travelling cost. It has been recognized that expatriate teacher's cost consumes a big share of the educational enterprise in the Arab Gulf States. The question which intrudes itself at this point is what about the actual and potential supply of native Arab Gulf States teachers ?

This question leads me to speak briefly on another great difficulty facing teaching profession in the Arab Gulf States, namely, the attitude of both already working teachers and potential supply of teachers such as college students.

The results obtained from a study conducted by the Ministry of Education in Qatar on 1979[3] confirmed the following:

* Preference for other careers than education is a widespread attitude among college students and even among those who are already practicing actual teaching in Qatar.
* Number of university students trained for teaching who select employment in teaching is gradually

decreasing. It is worthy to mention that there is no national law which requires of persons who are prepared for teaching to teach for a period of time, at least equivalent in length, to the period spent in their preparation.

* Disinclination toward the teaching profession is particularly acute among males. Females tend to have greater interest in teaching because their access to other professions is limited by some societal factors.

* In spite of a 40% increase made to teachers salaries in Qatar, teachers salaries are still not competitive with salaries offered in the commercial and industrial sectors of work.

The findings of the above-mentioned study could be generalized to other Arab Gulf States and until now stand valid. At this point one is justified to say that teachers shortage in the Arab Gulf States is further aggravated by attitudes prevailing on the part of both already practing teachers and potential supply of teachers. I think the Arab Gulf States are facing, with other developing countries, a very hard situation. It is a situation in which some hard economic facts are interacting with some societal facts. This situation has been depicted by Coombs in 1968 but neglected and bypast by both the economists and educationists in the developing countries. Coombs has put it as follows[4]:

"As the educational enterprise grows increasingly larger relative to the whole economy, and as it retains its labor-intensive character while competing enterprises become more capital-intensive, it is progressively more difficult for education to match competitive salaries attractive to top flight personnel".

Coombs went on to describe the social consequences' of these very economic facts in this way :

"In the degree to which it [education] fails, it contributes to a downward spiral of teacher status, and thus further compounds the difficulty it has in attracting precisely the kind of people it needs to improve educations quality and productivity".

At this point one cannot help it but to raise some important questions which must pre-occupy all the officials who are concerned with teachers education in the Arab Gulf States, namely, the ministers of education, university staff in general and staff of the colleges of education in particular and ABEGS staff and its constitutional bodies. Following are some of the questions of which I am thinking:

* How the potential supply of teachers in the Arab Gulf States can be improved in both quantity and quality ?

* What are the ways and means through which teachers education institutes in the Arab Gulf States can get the best pickings of the available manpower supply ?

* What are the necessary actions (social, financial, educational, administrative and legal) which must be taken to make the people trained for teaching, willing to teach and stay on the teaching job ?

* What are the specifications and characteristics of the programs through which the present stock of poorly qualified teachers can be upgraded ?

* The last but foremost question is how the present teachers training programs can be improved in order to get out of it enough quantity of the right quality ?

I believe that the afore-mentioned questions are disturbing but challenging. They must be answered by a task force to be combined in every Arab Gulf State, and one of the ABEGS responsibilities is to coordinate such efforts.

The answer of the last question raised above requires a description of the present state of affairs regarding teachers education in the Arab Gulf States. I will turn to this aspect in the section that follows.

III Teachers Education in the Arab Gulf States

Educational systems in the Arab Gulf States are almost identical. The educational system is consisted of general education (primary, intermediate and secondary education) and higher university education. The educational ladder in most of the Gulf States is six years for primary, three years for intermediate and three years for secondary education. In Kuwait the ladder is four years for each stage of the general education. In all the Arab Gulf States education is controlled by the central government in all of its aspects: in philosophy, planning, curricula, teachers education, examinations, policy of paying teachers and so on.

The system of teachers education in the Arab Gulf Sates is, relatively, recent. The changes made in this system are considered reflections of developments that happend in the educational system. Glimpse of the teachers education system in the Arab Gulf States can be made through description of the existing institutes for teachers preparation. In the Arab Gulf States three kinds of institutes for teachers preparation coexist as follows[5]:

A. Teachers Institutes

In some of the Arab Gulf States, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Sultanate of Omman and Iraq, there are teachers institutes

which are considered equivalent to secondary education. Students are enrolled in these institutes after completion of the intermediate school. Duration of study in these institutes is three years. There are institutes for males and others for females. Students in these institutes are prepared to be teachers at the pre-primary and primary schools. These teachers institutes are established, operated and supervised by the Ministry of Education.

B. Junior Colleges and Centers for Qualifying Teachers

There are in some Arab Gulf States junior colleges for teachers preparation. They are found in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait. Equivalent to junior colleges for teachers are the centers for qualifying teachers which are found in the United Arab Emerates since 1979. Both junior colleges and centers for qualifying teachers admit students after completing the senior high school and obtaining its general certificate. Duration of study in the junior colleges is two years, but duration of study in the centers for qualifying teachers ranges from one year to three years according to the educational level of the candidates and needs of the State to teachers. Students attending the junior college program are prepared for teaching at the intermediate schools (Junior High Schools). The junior colleges, also, provide upgrading services to non-qualified teachers already working at the primary stage

of education. Both junior colleges and centers for qualifying teachers are established, run, staffed and supervised by the Ministry of Education in their respective states. Males are admitted to junior colleges and centers which are separate from females ones.

C. University Colleges of Education

The third type of institutes responsible for teachers, preparation is the University colleges of education. They are found in all the Arab Gulf States. Students are admitted to such colleges after receiving the general certificate of the secondary education. In some of the university colleges of education, there are two systems for teachers, preparation. The first can be called the integrated system in which perspective teachers study courses distributed to three aspects of teacher education in the following manner: a) general cultural courses which are considered the university requirements such as arabic language, islamic cultural studies, science and foreign languages. Time devoted to such courses is 28% of total time spent in preparation. b) courses related to a certain specilization such as languages, mathematics, sciences and social studies. Time allocated for such courses is approximately 57% of the total time of teachers preparation. c) courses and activities relevent to the teaching profession such as foundations of education, educational pyschology, curriculum, school

administration, educational technology, methods of teaching and students teaching. The share of time devoted to the professional courses is 15% (time spent on student-teaching is not included in this percentage). Program of teachers preparation at these colleges takes four scholastic years on the average.

The second system of teachers preparation at the university colleges of education is the sequential system. In that system students are enrolled into the college of education for one year, after receiving their BA from a university college in a certain specialization; sciences, mathematics, social studies or languages. In that system ; courses and activities are focused on professional preparation. Teachers preparation program at the colleges of education follows the credit hours system except the college of education in Baghdad universtiy. The number of credit-hours needed for graduation from the colleges of education ranges from 132-145 credit hours. Colleges of education prepare students for teaching at both the intermediate and secondary schools. Teachers preparation program at the colleges is offered co-educationally in Iraq, Bahrain and Kuwait. But in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emerates, there are independent colleges of education for girls and others for boys.

IV. Some Suggested Development

Teachers education has preoccupied the Arab Nations at large and the Arab Gulf States in particular. Crisis in teachers education in the Arab Gulf States is more acute for an assortment of historical, educational, economic, and social factors. Let me share with you some of the suggested developments regarding teachers education and the teaching profession.

1. The root source of teachers supply :

There is a firm tendency towards unifying the root source of teachers by making their preparation within the university education frame. In a recent conference held on teachers education in the Arab Gulf States, the participants recommended that standard for teachers preparation should not be less than B.A. This recommendation has been isssued earlier by other conferences since 1957. There are many factors that militate against such suggestion:

a) the mutual misunderstanding and even mistrust between practioners and theorists in the educational field

b) appearant dissatisfaction regarding the performance of teachers who are graduates of university colleges of education

c) acute shortage of first-rate trainers of teachers

d) financial cost that such suggestion requires.

2. Research and Innovations

There is a strong call for colleges of education to be partially, a kind of educational research centers. It is said that improvement in teachers preparation should be based on findings of scientific research. It is further said that institutes for teachers preparation should be centers for innovations and experiments in education(6). To such suggestions one should say good but how ? If colleges of education are short of good professors for the teaching responsibilities, then how can they function as research centers ? The lesson learned from the outcomes of the existing educational research centers in some arab countries is that educational research does not pay off(7). Further-more in numerous cases educational research is irrelevant to educational practice. To those who are calling on colleges of education to take serious part in the educational research one should ask : in terms of which paradigm ?

3. The Socio-economic Status of Teachers

It has been recognized by many scholars in numerous occasions that quality of the teachers in every country is decisively influenced by what happen to their salaries relative to other salaries(8). It has been cermonial in the conferences and seminars hold on teachers education to find a recommendation calling on the States to improve the

social and economic status of teachers. To me such a recommendation is right and just. Recently it has been proven that teachers salary incentive influence the students achievement[9].

I think that the socio-economic status of teachers is complicated by many factors. One of these factors is that teachers salaries are lagging behind other salaries such as those at commercial and industrial sectors. If this phenomenon will continue, education will continue to get the poorest pickings of the available manpower supply. The second factor playing an important role in the socio-economic status of teacher is the policy of paying teachers uniformly, regarding of subject and performance. The uniform payment for teachers imposes a severe competitive handicap in getting good categories of teachers, who are usually rewarded much better in other professions. Consequently, we are faced with a situation in which too many poor teachers will drive good ones out of the teaching profession. What is needed in this regard is to adopt a flexable policy in teachers payment as well as in teachers promotion. Each teacher should be paid according to certain structure of merits and according to his level of performance.

References

1. Philip H. Coombs, The World Educational Crisis: A System Analysis (London:Oxford University Press, 1968).

2. Ibid P. 175.

3. Taher A. Razik, Faculty of Education Self-Study, (Doha, Qatar: University of Qatar Press 1982).

4. Philip H. Coombs, op.cit P. 35.

5. Data regarding teachers education institute are drawn from "A Study of Reality of Preparation of Teacher in the Gulf States" which has been presented to a conference held at Qatar University on January 7-9, 1984. The Conference was a Joint Venture by ABEGS, University of Qatar and ICET.

6. See the Recommendations cited in the final report of the above-mentioned conference.

7. A. El-Mahdi Abdel-Halim "Educational Research and the Executive Decision" A Paper presented at a seminar held by ABEGS and ALECSO, 1983, in Arabic Language

8. Philip H. Coombs op.cit p. 38.

9. Richard Turner and others "Policy Strategies Teacher Salary Incentive and Student Achievement". Educational Researcher, Vol. 15, No. 3, (March 1986).